February 14, 2018

Dear Members of the MSU faculty,

By our overwhelming votes of no confidence by Academic Congress and Faculty Senate, we have made our voices heard and told the world of our displeasure with the Board of Trustees. The MSU faculty have told the MSU community, told the state of Michigan, and told the world of our outrage at the Board of Trustees.

We spoke up even though we have no power to compel the Trustees to step down. Governor Snyder seems to have the power to remove the Trustee and the legislature seems to have the power to impeach. So we raise our voices to impel those in government to do the right thing. But we must also start looking forward to the day that trustees need to be replaced.

Larry Nassar is a monster. He has rightly been consigned to a cell for the rest of his unnatural life. Like all of you, my hope and belief is that his hundreds of victims will continue to draw strength from each other. I think I can safely speak for all of us when I say that we appreciate their strength and their courage. And we hope that each of them understands how deeply, deeply ashamed we are that anyone from the university that we love and serve hurt them. We are sorry.

I believe that the long perpetuation of Larry Nasser’s abuse is a symptom of a larger institutional problem at MSU, the gradual centralization of power. Over President Simon’s tenure, decisions large and small were increasingly concentrated in the upper administration and many of those administrators were naturally beholden to her personally. This power dynamic prevents transparency and blocks the flow of unwelcome news. The Trustees are supposed to choose, to oversee, and to be a check on the President. Instead, these Trustees have been completely complacent.

Consider the process of choosing the interim president. While the events of the past month have brought to light the tragic institutional errors that allowed Nasser’s abuses to be ignored, the fact remains that Board of Trustees have had all the facts for at least 17 months before President Simon was forced to resign, yet they appeared to have spent no time preparing for the inevitable presidential transition. The media floated 4 names, Engler, Blanchard, Granholm, and Murray. The latter two stated they were not interested so we ended up with the first with the second as an advisor. Apparently, the Trustees have no original ideas and I fear that their complacency will continue under the interim – and eventually under the permanent – President.

Going forward, I propose the faculty demand that a goal of institutional change at MSU must be devolution of power to the colleges and departments. This starts with the Board of Trustees changing its relationship with the President by selecting one who values this goal and acting as check on him or her. Soliciting input on the
selection of the president and listening to it would be a good measure of investment a future board has in this goal.

For better or worse, the Faculty Senate is our best mechanism for faculty to voice our views so I call upon the Senate to endorse this proposal.

Sincerely,

Lisa Lapidus
Member of the Faculty Senate for the College of Natural Sciences